

Action in the Space Between: From Latent to Active Boundaries

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Abstract

Boundaries have gained analytical prominence in sociology of science. Notably, there have been studies on how academics differentiate themselves from outsiders in order to secure their legitimacy. In university departments, scholars engage in boundary work to defend their intellectual communities and institutional resources. While boundary struggles are characteristic of academia, they rarely result in departmental restructuring. This paper examines a case where a theoretical divide between social and cultural anthropologists and biological anthropologists led to a departmental split. The study reveals a shift from peaceful coexistence to a full-blown conflict between two intellectual communities and asks, what circumstances gave rise to the activation of a latent intellectual boundary? Drawing on interview data, I demonstrate how changes in the distribution of faculty and the alignment of intellectual, seniority, and gender differences activated the latent boundary. After its activation, scholars engaged in boundary work and expressed their intellectual differences in faculty meetings and interactions with colleagues, which led to arguments about the department's identity that hampered the unit's operation. The study shows how boundary work among scholars can pull apart the fabric of a department, causing intellectual identities to diverge and the organization to split.

Introduction

Establishing boundaries forms social entities that include certain individuals and exclude others. Boundaries are often zones of action, sometimes even conflict, because groups engage in boundary work to defend and justify the logic behind the boundary that separates them (Gieryn 1999). In Bourdieu's field theory actors compete for social position, which gives rise to social structures that hierarchically position actors in (Bourdieu 1993). In Bourdieu's conceptualization, boundaries appear as fine lines that neatly separate what is inside and outside the fields. Eyal (2010) draws attention to the space between fields and argues that this space is thick and can reveal

social processes related to how fields differentiate themselves. His view that boundaries are spacious contexts for social action aligns closely with relational sociology, which highlights the dynamic, unfolding relations between social groups and how these social entities define themselves in relation to each other (Somers 1994; Emirbayer 1997).

The present study explores social action in the space between two intellectual communities and builds upon prior research by examining how latent boundaries—those that exist but are not currently expressed in social interaction—become activated and expressed in an organizational setting. I examine an anthropology department where the boundary between social and cultural anthropologists and biological anthropologists became polarized and the department split into two separate anthropology departments. The study's focus is on a shift from peaceful coexistence to a full-blown conflict between two intellectual camps.

Anthropology is an intriguing context for studying the activation and expression of intellectual boundaries because it is an internally divided discipline that has struggled with a shared understanding of its identity for decades. It has been traditionally divided into four subfields: sociocultural anthropology, biological or physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistic anthropology (Segal and Yanagisako 2005). Sociocultural anthropology is the study of culture and it uses ethnography as its method. Biological anthropology focuses on human population and relies on an evolutionary framework and laboratory analysis. Archaeologists investigate the physical remnants of human cultural activity and linguistic anthropologists study the relationship between language and culture. These two subgroups of anthropologists rely on varied methods, for instance, ethnographic fieldwork, computational methods, and laboratory work (Bernard 2006). Although these subfields are all concerned with explaining some aspects of culture, they tend to rely on distinct theoretical and epistemological perspectives. The theoretical tension between sociocultural

anthropology and biological anthropology runs particularly high because the former relies solely on a humanistic perspective and the latter on an evolutionary framework. Yet, this intellectual boundary is nothing new for anthropologists: it has existed since the discipline's early days. What conditions activated the latent intellectual boundary and ultimately led to organizational restructuring?

One might argue that tensions between different styles of thought, research traditions, and theoretical languages are common and part of how academic knowledge is organized (e.g., Knorr-Cetina 1991; 1999; Kagan 2009; Lamont 2009). Abbott (2001) even emphasized the tendencies in disciplines to split according to bipolar opposites. While academic life tends to be filled with conflict, departmental splits are unusual. There are studies on how universities restructure themselves in response to fiscal stress (Gumport 1999; 2000), but none on departmental splits that are based first and foremost on intellectual differences. In the discipline of anthropology these events have been highlighted, because a few elite departments have already split: Duke in 1988, Stanford in 1998, and Harvard in 2005. While these cases varied in how internal (concerned with the department) and external (concerned with the university) factors contributed to the departmental splits, they all demonstrated the theoretical divide between social and cultural anthropologists and biological anthropologists. One of the anthropologists interviewed in this study described the essence of the departmental split: "It was not sub-fields, it was epistemology and it was 'science' versus 'not particularly science' or in some cases 'no science to be allowed.'" So there was a real dividing point on what is a legitimate research topic, a research approach, or a baseline theory." Similarly, another anthropologist said that the split was concerned with "what is a scientific argument and what is not; what counts as anthropology and what does not. It was about the heart of the discipline."

This study demonstrates that as long as intellectual boundaries remain latent, they are not used as frames for constructing social relations. It is worth specifying what is meant by latent. An example from the area of tree growth provides a telling metaphor. Epicormic buds are said to lie dormant and hidden beneath the bark until certain circumstances give rise to their development and manifestation. In these instances—for example when damage occurs to higher parts of the bark or when the tree is exposed to more sunlight—latent buds develop into active branch-like shoots. In university departments, circumstances such as changes in the distribution of faculty across research areas or a controversial tenure case can have a similar effect. These conditions can activate a latent intellectual boundary after which individuals begin to express their ideologies. Intellectual differences begin to pattern social relations, frame claims for what is best for the department, and initiate organizational transformation.

The department I studied was initially perceived as a home for humanistic social and cultural anthropology. During this time, the dominant and minority theoretical camps coexisted relatively peacefully and the boundary between them remained latent. When the department hired new faculty in the area of evolutionary biological anthropology, the representation of the two groups of anthropologists became more equal. As the minority group grew larger it began to challenge the status quo and increase its demands for institutional resources. Moreover, the decision to expand biological anthropology resulted in an alignment of intellectual, seniority, and gender differences, which widened the divide. Biological anthropology consisted of only senior male scholars, and half of the social and cultural anthropologists were junior female scholars. In this new departmental landscape, the latent boundary between humanistic and evolutionary perspectives activated and became a salient framing device in faculty meetings and interactions

with colleagues. The conflict made the department dysfunctional and resulted in organizational restructuring.

In line with other scholars who have considered both structural and cultural features when explaining organizational outcomes (Binder 2002; Vaughan 2006), I analyzed interviews and newspaper articles in an effort to show how a processual perspective on the activation of a latent boundary can be used to explain organizational transformation. To demonstrate what initiated this process and how it evolved over time, I draw on theoretical concepts across different areas of sociology—sociology of science and knowledge, cultural sociology, and organizational sociology—that relate to boundary struggles: boundary work (Gieryn 1983; 1999), cultural toolkits (Swidler 1986), and faultlines (Lau and Murnighan 1998; 2005).

The article unfolds as follows. I first discuss prior research and theoretical concepts that help to explain how a latent boundary becomes activated and how its expressions can shape organizations. Next, I describe the research setting, data, and methods. The analysis is divided into two sections. First, I demonstrate how changes in the distribution and demographics of faculty across the two research areas activated an intellectual divide. Second, I show how the anthropologists expressed their intellectual differences and what consequences these expressions had for the operation of the department. After a summary of the findings, I discuss differences in how academics embody intellectual ideologies and how these differences affect the emergence and management of departmental conflicts.

Boundaries, Social Entities, and Organizational Transformation

The study of boundaries has become a central theme in the sociologies of science, knowledge, and professions (Gieryn 1983; Lamont and Molnár 2002). Scholars working in these

areas have paid attention to how disciplines and professions engage in boundary work when seeking to secure their autonomy, jurisdiction, and legitimacy (Gieryn 1983; 1999; Abbott 1988). It has been argued that the notion of boundaries also allows for a distinction between symbolic and social boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by actors to categorize objects, people, and practices, whereas social boundaries are stable patterns of behavior and social difference that enable group formation (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Gieryn (1983) emphasized that in order to understand boundary work one needs to explore the symbolic formulations of ideas and how they are enacted in social contexts. Similarly, Lamont and Molnár (2002) argued that symbolic and social boundaries occur together as social groups constantly compete in the production and diffusion of classification systems (see also Bourdieu 1984; 1990).

Many have highlighted how scientists, in particular, participate in jurisdictional struggles to distinguish themselves from those who have less expertise and legitimacy to make knowledge claims. Gieryn (1983; 1999; see also Taylor 1996) defined boundary work as discursive practices scientists use to draw a boundary between “science” and “non-science.” Disciplinary communities are like tribes that have their own identities and territories that members defend by employing a variety of devices geared to the exclusion of outsiders (Becher and Trowler 2001).

Although boundary activities have been widely studied in order to understand how scientists construct and defend their territories, there is less research on how boundaries occur in work organizations. For example, research shows how gender-based social boundaries matter in workplace contexts (e.g., Reskin and Hartman 1986; Williams 1995; Kay and Hagan 1999), but missing are studies that look at how organizational structures shape boundary processes, and vice versa, how the construction of boundaries influences organizations. In her ethnographic study of institutional reform in two teaching hospitals, Kellogg (2009, 681) found that reformers developed

oppositional identities “by drawing on boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and by defining defenders as adversaries who needed to be challenged.” This division between reformers and defenders, and the reformers’ role in the adoption of the institutional reform, suggest that boundary work can influence workplace transformation. Vallas (2001; see also Vallas 1998) drew specifically on boundary theory to show how the cultural boundary between technical workers and manual workers shaped the production of social boundaries within the workplace. Studying how manufacturing plants implemented automated production systems, Vallas found that technical workers emphasized their high-status knowledge in order to separate themselves from production workers.

Employees in any work organization have differing skills, responsibilities, demographic attributes, values, and ideologies, but what conditions activate latent boundaries and make divides significant in organizational contexts? Lau and Murnighan (1998) developed the concept of a faultline, which is similar to the notion of boundaries, and suggested that if individuals fall into two distinct and non-overlapping subgroups based on a demographic characteristic, a faultline is present. Faultlines can form around varied types of attributes, for example skills, values, and differences in personalities (Lau and Murnighan 2005). The authors found that the more attributes aligned thus dividing two groups, the stronger the faultline tended to be. This means that a faultline between old men and young women is stronger than a faultline between men and women.

Political scientists have explored a similar idea when trying to understand the interconnections between societal groups and political behavior. Bartolini and Mair (1990) defined divides as cleavages that incorporate empirical, normative, and organizational or behavioral levels. Empirical refers to socio-structural groups within the society, normative signifies their differing values and attitudes, and organizational refers to the political parties that emerge as part of the

cleavage. For example, two groups of people may belong to different social classes, have differing views on Planned Parenthood, and vote for opposing political parties. The core idea is identical to faultlines: the more differences there are that divide two groups, the more significant the divide becomes.

In addition to overlapping differences, Dyck and Starke (1999) suggested that unnoticed or latent organizational faultlines can become activated by some external force or critical event. We can think about, for example, faultlines or boundaries based on age that are activated by retirement or pension issues, racial divisions that are activated by affirmative action concerns, or a desire for organizational change that is promoted among young liberals against older conservatives (Dyck and Starke 1999). It has also been suggested that if a minority group suddenly increases in size due to some external factor, the majority group may begin to see it as more threatening and engage in discrimination (Blalock 1967).

When latent boundaries are activated, their expressions become more likely, which can lead to chaos and conflict. Organizational contexts that are in flux are fruitful for studying boundary work because they prompt “occupational groups to resort to less subtle forms of symbolic weaponry” (Vallas 2001, 31). The deployment of “symbolic weaponry” is similar to Swidler’s (1986) notions of the deployment of cultural toolkits during unsettled times. When examining the dynamic relationship between social actors, ideologies, and structural shifts, Swidler (1986, 279) distinguished between settled and unsettled times and stated that “bursts of ideological activism occur in periods when competing ways of organizing action are developing or contending for dominance.” It is in these times of uncertainty that new ideologies challenge taken-for-granted habits and modes of experience.

This study examines the conditions that activate a latent boundary and the expression of differences that lead to organizational transformation. The following analysis sheds light on two distinct phases in this process. First, the analysis shows a shift from stable to unstable conditions in which a change in power dynamics and overlapping differences activated a latent divide between two groups of anthropologists. Second, the study demonstrates how, as by activating the latent boundary, scholars' competing intellectual ideologies became expressed in departmental politics.

Data and Methods

The anthropology department this study focuses on was located in an elite American research university. It split into two smaller departments several years ago: one identified as a department of social and cultural anthropology and one as a department of biological anthropology. The analysis is mainly based on interviews conducted with the faculty and they demonstrate how the scholars made sense of their intellectual identities and participated in the departmental politics during the conflict. In order to construct a nuanced case study, I also collected 65 university newsletters, blogs, and newspaper articles between 2006 and 2012.ⁱ I draw on this data only to better understand the discipline's and the department's history. To obscure the identity of the department, these reports are not named in the analysis.

The interviews were conducted over the course of 18 months, some years after the departmental split had occurred.ⁱⁱ I contacted all of the individuals who were faculty up to three years before, during, and after the department split. Seventeen agreed to participate in the study and an equal number refused. Many of those who refused said, for instance, that they did not want to revisit the painful memories or they considered it to be risky for their careers. Although the experiences of the individuals who were not interviewed would have been extremely valuable for

the study, I did not pressure them to participate. Their refusal to share their thoughts on the departmental split indicated how sensitive the case was.

Of the seventeen interviewees, fifteen were current or past members of the anthropology department and two were faculty members from other departments in the same university, but who had played some role in the departmental split and had detailed knowledge about it. Six of the interviewees had experienced the departmental split personally and the others had left before the restructuring or had not yet arrived at the department.

The interviews were semi-structured and covered questions on struggles both at the disciplinary and the departmental level. For instance, I began the interviews by asking how the interviewees would define the discipline of anthropology and its epistemological disputes. Concerning the department, I asked questions about the departmental split and the interviewee's experiences of it. Many of the interviewed anthropologists gave suggestions for what books and academic articles to read in order to understand the background of the theoretical tensions present in the discipline of anthropology. In the analysis, I draw on some of that work. The interviews, which took from 30 to 75 minutes, were conducted face to face or over the phone, audiotaped, and then transcribed. Three interviewees refused to be audiotaped, so instead I took extensive notes during the interview. To obscure the identities, I randomly assigned names irrespective of gender. When necessary for the argument I make, I reveal whether the interviewees belonged to the field of humanistic social and cultural anthropology or evolutionary biological anthropology. Finally, I conceal the exact research focus of the interviewed anthropologists as well as their rank in order to hide their identities.

I used a modified inductive approach to analyze the interview transcripts (Glaser and Strauss 2010). Although I approached the data in a detailed manner, looking for various coding

categories, my goal was to understand how the departmental split occurred and how the scholars described their actions and experiences. The analytical process highlighted shifts in the distribution of faculty and overlapping differences within groups and their connection to the activation and expression of intellectual differences.

Shifting Power Relations and the Activation of a Latent Intellectual Boundary

The elements of humanistic and evolutionary theories and the tensions between them have existed throughout anthropology's history. University departments of anthropology seek to accommodate anthropologists from various research approaches or purposefully emphasize a specific research focus. When the anthropology department of this study was established, it was mainly a department of humanistic social and cultural anthropology. During the years before the departmental split, there were twice as many social and cultural anthropologists as there were evolutionary biological anthropologists.ⁱⁱⁱ I describe how changes in the distribution of faculty across research areas and overlapping differences within them led to the activation of the latent intellectual boundary.

The coexistence of different intellectual ideologies was seemingly peaceful prior to the split. This was because the social and cultural anthropologists held the majority of faculty positions, and thus the power relations were clear. Glen, whose work related to evolutionary biological anthropology, described what the department was like years before the split:

Prior to the polarization, there was at least a fair amount of interaction. I would not say that it was a highly unified department, but it was a "live and let live" department at some level. And it was so unbalanced in its distribution of faculty that those who were from the scientific orientation did not even make an attempt, they regarded themselves as such a minority that the idea of achieving equality, it just was not going to happen.

The faculty members were not necessarily friendly with each other, but the “live and let live” atmosphere was achieved through an unequal distribution of scholars across the competing theoretical perspectives. As long as the social and cultural anthropologists had the majority of faculty positions and more power in departmental decision making, members of the minority theoretical camp did not challenge the status quo. Although there was a clear intellectual boundary between the two groups, it remained largely latent. Peter explained the strategy for peaceful departmental life in similar terms:

Because if you have only one archaeologist, the one archaeologist is dependent on the rest of the department for his own wellbeing, whether it is offering a course or playing a part in the major requirements or other kinds of activities for the department. If you had ten archaeologists, as in some departments they do, then you can ignore the rest of the department and you can have your own subgroup, so it becomes more of a semi-independent unit. Of course, you communicate with the others in the department or with the chair of the department to the extent that is administratively required and necessary. Other than that, they just go on their own way.

Prior to the split, anthropologists who worked in the fields of biological anthropology, archeology, and linguistic anthropology and relied on evolutionary theory felt they had less decision-making power in faculty meetings and fewer institutional resources, such as graduate students. Therefore, while the unequal distribution of faculty positions across theoretical camps guaranteed peaceful coexistence, scholars in these minority subfields began to feel mistreated and the existing latent boundary became more relevant for them. John described these feelings:

It is also one of the reasons that led to the split, because certain faculty, including me, felt like we were continuously deprived of graduate students, because the old department thought it was a department of social and cultural anthropology so people like archeologists and linguists and medical people and so forth were peripheral. And that we should be content with teaching undergraduates and not have our own personal graduate students.

When the social and cultural anthropologists held the majority of the faculty positions, scholars from the other theoretical camp were forced to accept the lack of departmental resources. It has been noted that organizational conflicts rarely occur without a sense of collective injury (Tucker 1993). The biological anthropologists had experienced a collective injury as they were “continuously deprived of graduate students,” so for them the possibility of a departmental split was an advantageous opportunity. John added that after the split he had access to more institutional resources and his position in the department improved: “In the new department I was able to be more central, to be more active, to have graduate students, to have a nicer office, to have all kinds of nice things.”

From the perspective of the dominant subfield, however, the possibility of losing the powerful position appeared as a threat. Glen, a biological anthropologist, said that when he joined the department he was informed by a senior social and cultural anthropologist that the distribution of faculty would not change in the years to come: “When I joined the department, I was told in certain terms that I should never expect to see another biological anthropologist in the faculty as long as I was here. And that was an explicit statement to me by a senior faculty member who was interviewing me for the position. It was very, very clear.” Gavin reflected on the unequal balance of power and emphasized that university leadership should keep an eye out for how minority groups are treated:

I think it is hard when there is a dominant group that's very powerful, and you have got a minority who then can't get the resources they need or want. Somebody in a leadership position needs to be looking out for that situation and making sure that more voices are heard, or if they really think that there's a segment of the department that isn't getting the resources they need, they need to figure out how to make that work.

The situation in the department changed dramatically when a few years before the split the university administration decided to strengthen the area of evolutionary biological anthropology. According to the interviewed anthropologists^{iv}, the administrative plan to expand the department towards evolutionary biological anthropology was a significant shift, given the department's longstanding focus on social and cultural anthropology. According to Mary, a social and cultural anthropologist, the administration was concerned that postmodernist approaches were influencing the anthropology department and shifting it away from being a legitimate anthropology department:

One of the things that happened before the departmental split was that some people sold to the deans the argument that what was happening with social and cultural anthropology at our university was radically different from the dominant view in the field. That it was bunch of feminist and Marxist postmodernists who were going off at the deep end and that they needed to be stopped. Many of the deans bought that, because they did not like what was going on in the department.

Mary described how some of her colleagues convinced the administration that the future of the department was not safe in the hands of the social and cultural anthropologists, whose thinking was shaped by postmodernist theories. Therefore, it would be appropriate to hire scholars who

could strengthen evolutionary biological anthropology and balance out the dominance of humanistic approaches. This attempt provoked the intellectual divide within the department that had until now remained largely latent. As Glen, a biological anthropologist, explained:

At the time when I came here, this was a department that heavily emphasized postmodernist interpretations. The people who were scientific, or who based their intellectual existence in an idea of a real and objective world and its representations, were a minority. The deans at that point came to the department and said they will give us two positions in biological or physical anthropology and they told us who they were going to be. It was very misguided. It was direct, we had to do it. The majority of the department at that point became very polarized, because it is not a reasonable statement. The majority of the department was expressing great anxiety and stress over having these two new positions, because in the world of human origins in biological anthropology you could not find anyone, especially at that time, other than rather fundamentally scientific bound. So that sensitized the department. That began what you could call an irritation that developed eventually into a full-scale unease and eventually battle grounds were established.

Although the university administration wanted to strengthen the minority group, which was Glen's own research area, he acknowledged that the way in which it was done was ill-advised and likely to polarize the theoretical divide between the two groups of anthropologists. Although the anthropologists' accounts of the departmental split were very similar, there were differences in how social and cultural anthropologists and biological anthropologists described the decision to expand evolutionary biological anthropology. In an earlier quote, Mary stated that "some people sold to the deans the argument" that postmodernist approaches should be stopped, which suggests that biological anthropologists initiated the hiring of new scholars in their own research area by

approaching the deans. However, Glen, a biological anthropologist, stated: “The deans at that point came to the department and said they will give us two positions in biological or physical anthropology and they told us who they were going to be.” In his view, it was a top-down decision. Despite these differences in their accounts, it is safe to say that the administrative decision did not openly involve all the members of the department. The new additions to the side of evolutionary biological anthropology, taken together with prior feelings of unfairness concerning the distribution of institutional resources, began to activate the latent intellectual boundary.

Strengthening the faultline between the two groups of anthropologists, the theoretical divide co-occurred with an overlap in demographic characteristics (Lau and Murnighan 1998; 2005). After the new hires, all of the biological anthropologists were tenured men who relied on evolutionary perspectives, whereas half of the social and cultural anthropologists were recently hired women.^v The demographic characteristics regarding seniority and gender thus aligned with the faculty members’ differing views on anthropological theory. Victoria, a social and cultural anthropologist, described the antagonistic situation between the different generations of scholars as a language barrier: “All of a sudden, half the department—the people under 45—were talking a theoretical language that the senior half of the department did not understand.” Mary, another social and cultural anthropologist, explained that there was a concern for the future of the department:

It happens a lot in academia, when you have a conflict between generations, the succession of generations, you often have senior people saying “oh these younger people they are doing stuff that we do not even understand and we do not like; they are taking the field and killing the discipline.”

Because of the new hires in biological anthropology, the former minority group increased in size and suddenly had a chance to engage in rivalry for institutional resources. The biological anthropologists could assert their demands for what they should be entitled to. Moreover, the administrative efforts to strengthen biological anthropology created two groups of anthropologists that were equal in size and divided along characteristics relating to theory, seniority, and gender. Instead of a drift between humanistic and evolutionary approaches, a struggle emerged between senior male biological anthropologists and junior female social and cultural anthropologists. Taken together, these shifts activated the latent boundary and the scholars' intellectual differences began to frame claims made for the department's identity.

Expressions of Intellectual Differences and the Path to Organizational Restructuring

The members of the department began to voice, manifest, and express their intellectual differences both in one-on-one interactions and faculty meetings focused on deciding on new faculty hires. Expressions of intellectual differences in one-on-one meetings were personal attacks very similar to workplace bullying that is likely to emerge in times of organizational uncertainty (Hodson, Roscigno, and Lopez 2006). In faculty meetings, expressions of differences were intellectually framed claims for what kind of faculty hires the department should make. Decision making about new hires was contentious, because it could affect which research area had more power in the department. Expressions of intellectual differences both in the form of personal attacks and claims for faculty hires damaged workplace culture and hampered the operation of the department to the extent that university administration had to intervene.

The following analysis also demonstrates that the activation of the latent intellectual boundary affected scholars differently, which could be seen in how they expressed intellectual

differences in departmental politics. For some, departmental decision making was about defending the purity of the discipline, whereas for others the operation of the department remained as the main responsibility. As such, some displayed rigid academic identities and used disciplinary standpoints to justify actions taken to safeguard the legitimacy of the department (Zerubavel 1996). Others displayed more flexible academic identities and were willing to put their disciplinary standpoints aside and make intellectual compromises for ensuring the operation of the department. The provocative style of expressing intellectual differences was not a stable characteristic of the department, but appeared after the activation of the latent intellectual boundary.

Personal Attacks

Interviewees described expressions of intellectual differences that were directed at a specific scholar as particularly hurtful. In these instances, the expressions seemed like attacks against character rather than differences of opinion regarding anthropological research. Carl shared his experience: “I was one of the people who pushed for the split partly because my own work was under attack. I work in an area that combines biology and psychology and that made me a target. I was actually called anti-feminist, racist, Nazi, all that.” Experiences of name-calling were insulting and made Carl want to support the departmental split. Peter, a social and cultural anthropologist, described an incident where his colleague criticized him for not handling an administrative issue correctly:

He thought I was not handling some aspect of the administration correctly and he confronted me. He said that I should apologize to him. I said, I have no reason to apologize and he was very adamant. Other people did not feel good about it, whichever side they took. I do not know why they have to confront a person in public like that. If he came to my office I could have talked it over, but no, he wanted to make a public issue of it. He may have had his own reasons,

I suppose, because a long time ago I published an article, which he did not like. That may have stayed in his mind and maybe he was having grudges against me.

Peter perceived his colleague's actions as bad behavior and he could not understand the motivation for it. He suspected that the incident might relate to an intellectual disagreement that had taken place at a time when the two groups of anthropologists coexisted somewhat peacefully. While the incident had been downplayed at the time, it resurfaced around the administrative disagreement when the faculty members had equal power and incentive to confront each other.

In an effort to reduce the likelihood of personal attacks and ensure the operation of the department, Glen developed strategies for trying to ease the feelings of hostility. He sought to balance out the disciplinary standpoints by establishing a neutral ground for interactions with colleagues from the opposing side.

In order to have a conversation, you would specifically need to set up an appointment with another faculty member and establish a neutral territory in which to hold those conversations and they still were very tense and I know it because I individually made those appointments, not to make myself a hero, but I went out of my way to try to do some talking and it was the hardest talking I have had to do during my entire life in terms of strain and feelings of hostility that existed there.

Expressions of intellectual differences that were directed at individual scholars, such as name-calling and public confrontation, were perceived as bad behavior. Peter explained that in his view the departmental split was "partly disciplinary, but largely personality, which was really a farcical thing since anthropologists are supposed to understand people, right? Some of these people had no intention of having sympathy or understanding with others. They just wanted to have their

own way.” Continued attacks and confrontations damaged the department’s workplace culture and many began to see the possibility of a departmental split as a way out.

Territorial Feuds over Faculty Positions

The expressions of intellectual differences in the faculty meetings were directed at a whole group of anthropologists and concerned with what the department’s research focus should be. The main strategy for influencing the department’s research focus was concerned with new faculty hires. Gavin described the background of these struggles: “I think at some level it has to be competition over resources or something. ‘I want to hire experimentalists, because that’s what I do,’ and ‘you want to hire somebody who does interviews, because that’s what you do.’ We each desperately want to have somebody we can talk to.” In departmental hiring, the hope was to strengthen one’s own research area, which was seen as the most legitimate in the discipline of anthropology. Hiring from within your own research area was also the main strategy for strengthening your theoretical group’s position in the department. Peter described how the two theoretical camps brawled and hampered decision making efforts: “Sometimes some of these people did not talk to each other at all. They talk very badly about others behind their back which I thought was awful, but that is what they did. At the faculty meeting, they would try to sabotage each other by disagreeing, by not casting their vote along with the majority.” Glen called the struggles on hiring decisions as “a territorial feud over faculty positions.”

In order to demonstrate what the expressions of intellectual differences were like in the context of hiring decisions, I focus on two accounts. Peter, a social and cultural anthropologist, shared an incident where the department was allowed to hire biological anthropologists.

It is quite obvious that certain people just did not have respect for archaeology or biological anthropology. If a position comes up or the possibility for the biological anthropology, then

the social and cultural anthropology people shut it down. It was very unfortunate. There was a chance to hire several biological anthropologists and/or archaeologists. The dean said you can hire that many all at once and there was an immediate objection. My position was to be more careful about these disciplines and I thought it is a good thing to beef up biological anthropology. These other people, this ringleader and the other people who followed him, put up a serious objection. As a result, we just lost out at the chance.

Peter was willing to view the biological anthropologists as a welcome addition to their department despite the fact that these hires would strengthen the opposing theoretical camp. This suggests he was able to distinguish his membership to the department from his membership to the broader disciplinary community. In contrast, Amanda, who relied on evolutionary theories, had a different perspective on hiring a scholar from the opposing subfield, this time a social and cultural anthropologist.

There was one case as to if so and so should be employed, this person had a very respectable record of publications, but they were very, if you will, humanistic in orientation, very oriented to social justice and quite literary and not based on fieldwork. I remember beginning to feel pretty uneasy, is this person really an anthropologist or not? And if we employ this person, as some of the professors on the faculty were pushing us to do, are we moving into a direction that would set new precedent and pretty soon we might have a department that might be very good and very respected, but not very anthropological. Now if, and this did not happen, but suppose that in the faculty meeting I had said “but hey, this person has not done any fieldwork,” and the answer would come back immediately, “his whole life is his fieldwork, he is a [racial minority] and grown up in this country, he can do auto-ethnography, so do not give me that argument.” But the point is that this person still did not write like an anthropologist, he was not reasoning like an anthropologist. He would not fit in, he would be an outsider.

Maybe that is good, because sometimes you change things to the better by having an outsider become part of the new mix. But this began to worry me.

This lengthy story regarding a hiring decision demonstrates how differently Amanda thought about the possibility of hiring someone outside of her own subfield. Amanda was concerned about the department employing an anthropologist whose work relied on auto-ethnography, lacked traditional fieldwork, and was different from her own research. She was worried about the legitimacy of the potential hire's research topics and methodologies and how such an unconventional hire might influence how their department was perceived by others in the field. These two descriptions of hiring decisions show how differently anthropologists drew on their disciplinary and departmental memberships when making decisions about the department's identity and research focus.

As the difficulties with coming to a shared understanding on new hires persisted, the situation in the department was developing into a university wide issue. Peter explained how the university administration was becoming concerned that the department was unable to compete for the most up-and-coming anthropologists in the field. If the department hoped to hold on to their elite position, which was important for the university administration, being able to attract the best scholars was necessary.

It was difficult. You had to try to make sure that the people show a modicum of respect for each other and help each other come to a resolution and consensus of some sort. Of course, 100 percent of that consensus I never expected, but in hiring people, the dean expects a close to 100 percent unanimity and, if not, the dean will listen very carefully to the people who disagree. It was not a good idea to have two or three people say no to a hiring of a candidate.

I can name some whom later became well-known anthropologists, but we lost out on these people.

Because of the difficulties associated with departmental decision making none of the faculty members wanted to become the chair. Even at peaceful times, the chair's role can be tough, because it is a leadership position with no undisputed authority. In an antagonistic department the coalitions among faculty members can impede the chair's ability to lead and manage the department. Peter had experienced how impossible it was to find someone to lead the department: "Nobody wanted to be chair. The dean called us in, all the potential candidates for the chair. That meant the people who have not served as chair before and people who are not assistant professors, so he went around saying 'why can't you be chair?' We all had reasons for why we could not do it."

At the same time, working conditions were becoming unbearable. There was talk about the department's junior faculty beginning to feel threatened as their tenure decisions came up. Many dreaded coming to their offices and were afraid of confrontations with their colleagues. Some even chose early retirement or an academic position elsewhere. Amanda described her personal decision to leave the department in the midst of the conflict: "Things were visibly getting worse and essentially I reasoned it is not much fun to be in a department that is fighting all the time and it looks like it is getting worse rather than getting better. So I will just take early retirement."

The Split

It became clear to the university administration that they would have to intervene to ease the departmental conflict. Leo described the university administration's final decision: "It is clear that people became unable to work with each other on the personal level and it became entirely

dysfunctional and they could not make decisions about hiring. They could not make decisions about anything. So I think the deans felt that the only way to get it functioning would be to just split it.” Glen said that “the problems went on and on and the leadership finally gave up and allowed the split to take place.” The department was permitted to vote on splitting up and a majority of the faculty members voted yes.

Once the decision was made, each faculty decided whether to join a department of biological anthropology or a department of social and cultural anthropology. These choices were made on the basis of one’s own research approach and theoretical framework, which meant that the organizational transformation reflected the initial divide between humanistic social and cultural anthropology and evolutionary biological anthropology. According to Carl, the structural change eased the departmental politics: “Prior to the split for a number of years, every appointment was a big issue, also the recruitment of graduate students. With the split, in a sense, those issues went away. So then after the split, those issues were no longer translated to larger, political issues.”

The academic community was following intently how the situation was unfolding in the department. According to Amanda, the split in her department “was a subject of great interest throughout the anthropological profession across the country.” Gavin noted that “people thought that this would be the first split among many in the discipline of anthropology; that this tendency would spread across the state.” Furthermore, Glen said it was seen as a model for other departments that had a similar divide and were on the verge of splitting: “Many of the tensions that led to a split here continued in other departments throughout this country. In some cases we were explicitly seen as a model for some potential splits in other universities.” He continued to say: “Over time it became recognized nationally that the struggles in anthropology were not sub-disciplinary, but epistemological. [Our department] was seen, in various ways—both positively and negatively—

as the center of the issues and as a potential resolution of the strong epistemological challenges in anthropology as a whole.”

Concluding Discussion: Defending Departments and Disciplines

This study examined the activation and expression of an intellectual boundary that resulted in organizational restructuring in an anthropology department. For the departmental split to occur, both the activation and expression of intellectual differences were needed. I used epicormic buds as a metaphor for explaining how particular circumstances can give rise to the activation of a latent boundary. After the activation of the boundary, individuals began to express their intellectual ideologies and use them as weapons in departmental conflicts that led to organizational restructuring. But there were differences in how individuals drew on ideologies during times of conflict. I argue that these differences were associated with how scholars perceived themselves as members of the department and the discipline.

The circumstances that activated the latent boundary between the two groups of anthropologists related to changes in the distribution and demographic characteristics of the faculty. Against the department’s longstanding history in humanistic social and cultural anthropology, the new hires in biological anthropology were seen as controversial. The increase in the size of the minority group shifted the power relationship between social and cultural anthropologists and biological anthropologists from asymmetrical to symmetrical (Blalock 1967). This was an opportunity for the minority group to fight for more institutional resources than what it had had before. The divide between the two groups became even more significant as the members of the department were divided along several overlapping differences: theoretical perspectives, seniority, and gender. Because the social and cultural anthropologists had more

junior faculty than the biological anthropologists, they risked losing tenure cases along with their chance of dominance in the department. Such high stakes made the overlap in intellectual and demographic characteristics so significant for the activation of the latent intellectual boundary.

Swidler (1986, 279) noted that it is during unsettled times that different ways of organizing action begin to compete for dominance and “bursts of ideological activism” become more common. Vallas (2001) referred to the use of symbolic weaponry during uncertain times. The changes in the distribution and demographic characteristics of faculty created instability and expressions of intellectual differences surfaced in faculty meetings and interactions with colleagues. Political scientists have noted that cleavages can be exploited and that differences among people can be used as strategic resources in political battles (Neto and Cox 1997; Mozaffar, Scaritt and Galaich 2003). In a similar manner, scholars used the differences in their intellectual ideologies as tools in departmental politics.

As the expressions of intellectual differences continued to hamper decision making and operation of the department, the departmental conflict shifted from an internal struggle to a university-wide concern. The department was not able to hire new faculty, decide on graduate students, or guarantee fair tenure reviews for junior scholars. Finally, nobody in the department was willing to serve as the chair. The conflict had consumed the department, made it dysfunctional, and the university administration decided to split it apart.

Not all anthropologists expressed their intellectual ideologies and participated in the departmental politics in similar ways, however. Some voted against the departmental split because they saw the coexistence of different theories and methods as the essence of the discipline. They were more understanding when it came to different intellectual ideologies and less concerned about hiring a scholar from the opposing theoretical camp. Others drew on their intellectual ideologies

when making arguments about what was best for the department. In what follows, I discuss reasons for these differences.

I found that anthropologists were affected by the activation of the latent boundary differently. This could be seen in how they perceived their memberships to the department and the discipline. For some the departmental conflict was an opportunity to display rigid academic identities that had remained hidden during the live and let live era (Zerubavel 1996). They expressed intellectual differences by attacking the work of colleagues and making hiring decisions about the purity of the discipline. Yet some perceived the operation of the department as their main responsibility and were willing to make intellectual compromises to ensure that. Importantly, the provocative style of expressing intellectual differences was not a stable characteristic of the department, but an outcome of the activation of the latent intellectual boundary.

Compared to non-elite departments, it may be that elite institutions are more likely to nurture and accept the display of rigid academic identities. This would suggest that intellectual conflicts that lead to departmental restructuring are more likely to happen in elite departments. Laura, an anthropologist who left the department to work in a smaller teaching institution, said that she had not experienced similar struggles: “You can’t survive in a fish bowl in a small college, if there are a lot of bad things going on. You are not going to last very long. There is a real impetus for people to get along.” In large elite research universities, however, the departmental struggles can be particularly brutal, because scholars may see themselves as the authority figures of the discipline. Along the same lines, Gouldner (1957) described faculty members as either cosmopolitans or locals. Cosmopolitans looked for an outer reference group for identity and validation and they had low loyalty to their employing institutions. In contrast, locals relied on an inner reference group for identity and validation and were committed to the institutions that had

hired them. Similarly, Hermanowicz (1998) studied scientists' occupational identities and found a difference between what he called elites and communitarians. In comparison to the communitarians, the elites were scientists who felt morally committed to their profession and its standards.

The display of academic identities is also related to individual personalities. Laura anticipated that the departmental split would put an end to the hostility between colleagues: "I thought maybe they will be happy in their own spaces and no longer compete for limited resources and be happy apart. But I found out it had more to do with personalities than the discipline. The same people who were creating problems in the old department were creating problems in the new department. That had nothing to do with epistemology." Addressing the question of personality, Victoria said of two of her colleagues: "If there was a turf war and she was on the other side, I would leave, which is what I did actually." She compared the person to another colleague, who in her view had a more admirable approach to the departmental politics: "She could lead with her charm and excellence, but not her arrogance." Victoria associated certain personality traits with effective leadership in an antagonistic department.

Departments and universities need leaders who anticipate conflicts, manage them, and emphasize scholars' responsibilities to both the department and the discipline. Even if a department has latent divides and scholars who are inclined to display rigid academic identities, detecting discord early may prevent the activation of latent boundaries and departmental conflicts. When reflecting on the history of his own department and the uneven distribution of institutional resources prior to the departmental split, Gavin pondered: "Somebody in a leadership position needs to be looking out for that situation and making sure that more voices are heard, or if they really think that there's a segment of the department that isn't getting the resources they need, they

need to figure out how to make that work.” This is an important advice, because disciplinary conflicts that take place in departments are not just attempts to shape the creation of new knowledge. They influence workplace culture, employee wellbeing, career progression, and training of students. They are instances of the dark side of academia that should not be swept under the rug.

Author Biography

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Notes:

ⁱ The newspaper data consists of 65 newspaper articles, blogs, and university newsletters that were published or posted between 2006 and 2012. When gathering this data online, I used search words that focused on departmental splits and the tension between evolutionary and humanistic approaches.

ⁱⁱ The interviews are retrospective, which may influence the findings in unpredictable ways. Yet, the respondents described the departmental split very similarly. What varied in their accounts were their intellectual ideologies and how they expressed them in departmental politics.

ⁱⁱⁱ I was able to establish the shifts in the number of faculty across research areas through university records and network data collected for a larger research project.

^{iv} The analysis relies mainly on the interviewed anthropologists' accounts. I contacted two individuals who worked in the university administration at the time of the departmental split. One agreed to be interviewed but the other did not. I draw on this one interview but do not highlight it or describe the individual in order to protect his/her identity.

^v This was established using the university records and network data collected as part of a larger research project.